

COMFORT DEPLOYMENT 2019: CONTINUING LIFE LESSONS

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U.S. Navy Hospitalman Cassandra Bonsall, assigned to the hospital ship USNS Comfort (T-AH 20), escorts a patient at a temporary medical treatment site in Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic, Oct. 16, 2019. Comfort is working with health and government partners in Central America, South America, and the Caribbean to provide care on the ship and at land-based medical sites, helping to relieve pressure on national medical systems, including those strained by an increase in cross-border migrants. (U.S. Navy photo by Mass Communication Specialist 3rd Class Brendan Fitzgerald)

I have been serving in the U.S. Navy for just over two years now. I have already learned many life lessons and have many stories to tell, and I am continuing to learn and be shaped into the Sailor I want to be. One of the most memorable and life-changing events in my life was the 2019 Comfort Deployment, a humanitarian mission aboard the USNS Comfort to Central and South America and the Caribbean. On this deployment, I was able to see, feel, smell and experience 12 different countries, their cultures and their hardships. I took away so much from this deployment and look forward to sharing all the lessons and struggles, which God has allowed me to acquire. The three most vital personal lessons I picked up on this deployment is confidence in my abilities, the importance of mentorship and the realization of the immense pain of mankind throughout the world.

My greatest testing of confidence came in the form of earning my Enlisted Surface Warfare Specialist (ESWS) qualification, and working at the medical sites on a daily basis. It took me four long, hard and grinding months to earn my ESWS qualification while still fulfilling my other responsibilities. It was a joy to be challenged and to test my confidence. It was also a tough battle that will forever be embedded in my memory as a milestone of accomplishment and pride. In addition, my confidence in my abilities as a corpsman also grew on the medical sites as I had numerous opportunities to try my hand at various medical tasks, thanks to the guidance and support of the doctors and nurses I served with. I can now confidently apply the training I received aboard Comfort, which will greatly enhance both my personal and professional life. I am so thankful to have been given a chance to learn so much while serving on this mission.

Another life lesson I have taken away from being onboard the USNS Comfort is the importance of strong and heartfelt mentorship. A few key individuals on this deployment have spent a great deal of time sharing their pearls of wisdom and knowledge with me, which stems from their years of experience full of victories and failures. Challenging my every step, my mentors have not backed away from being honest with me over my own faults and strengths. They have pushed me to set and accomplish goals and to become a better leader. I have learned much about myself and how to be a better mentor, be giving of myself and be a leader to others in my life. I am thankful for the motivating and courageous mentors who were willing to be honest and share their wisdom with me.



U.S. Navy Hospitalman Cassandra Bonsall and Hospitalman Morgan Bishop, assigned to the hospital ship USNS Comfort (T-AH 20), record the vital signs of a Kittian woman being seen for a dermatology problem at a temporary medical treatment site in Basseterre, St. Kitts and Nevis, Oct. 10, 2019. Comfort is working with health

and government partners in Central America, South America, and the Caribbean to provide care on the ship and at land-based medical sites, helping to relieve pressure on national medical systems, including those strained by an increase in cross-border migrants. (U.S. Navy photo by Mass Communication Specialist 3rd

Class Danny Ray Nuñez Jr.)

When USNS Comfort went out to sea in the fall of 2018 on my first deployment with the ship, it was my first time out of the United States but I did not have many opportunities to go to shore. On the contrary, this year, I have been to almost every one of the 12 countries and have felt and seen a snapshot of how people in these nations live and deal with issues. It was amazing to see the numerous mothers and fathers who entrusted the incredible medical staff with their children's lives. I have seen parents stand in line for hours or often days just to see if their children are healthy. Finally, the living conditions of some of the individuals the Comfort staff saw and were able to assist left a real mark on me. In conclusion, the humanitarian mission aboard the USNS Comfort was adventure which I will never forget. I know I have confidence in my skills and my experiences from this deployment will be forever applicable to my future endeavors. I will seek out more mentors similar to the great people on Comfort whom I respect so much. Finally, I will be more aware of the suffering in foreign nations and their many needs. After all I have had the opportunity to do, I know this experience was more than worth more than I could ever quantify, and I hope that the U.S. Navy continues to assist their neighbors abroad.